

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Bread or Stones?

Louisiana congregations challenge child poverty

by Alí Bustamante

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JSRI Upcoming Events

August 3

JSRI is co-hosting a [Catholic Teach-In on Migration](#) at Holy Name of Jesus School cafeteria 6:30 PM- 8:30 PM.

August 10-12

Fr. Kammer and Dr. Weishar will participate as executive committee members in a dialogue at Ignatius House in Atlanta on "Recovering the Human Face of Immigration" with 25 religious leaders from across the country.

August 21

Fr. Kammer will begin co-teaching the Ignatian Colloquium for freshman honors students.

JSRI Recent Activities

July 30

Fr. Kammer addressed attendees from 16 Jesuit universities at the Ignatian Solidarity Network University Leaders Summit.

July 22-24

Dr. Weishar, Dr. Mikulich, and Mr. Bustamante led workshops on migration, economic development, and hyper-incarceration for the

Recently the Annie E. Casey Foundation updated its *Kids Count Data Book*, which measures and ranks the wellbeing of children across the U.S. Louisiana ranked 48th among the 50 states in overall childhood wellbeing, the state's lowest ranking since the *Kids Count* rankings began in 2012. Only New Mexico and Mississippi ranked lower than Louisiana this year, 49th and 50th respectively. The rest of the Gulf South also performed poorly, Alabama ranked 45th, Texas 41st, and Florida 37th.

The low *Kids Count* ranking speaks to how poorly legislators, policymakers, and communities in the Gulf South are addressing the economic wellbeing, education, health, and family and community wellbeing of the region's 13.9 million children. However, the low ranking is nothing new to Louisiana and the rest of the Gulf South. Since 2012, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas have ranked among the ten lowest performing states in the country every year. Florida achieved its highest ranking of 37th this year.



The Gulf South states lag the rest of the country in most of the 16 social and economic indicators that comprise the *Kids Count* childhood wellbeing rankings. Among these are: childhood poverty, low-birthweight babies, children whose parents lack secure employment, children without health insurance, children in single-parent families, fourth

graders not proficient in reading, high school students not graduating on time, and, rate of teens not in school and not working.

Despite continuous reporting on children's wellbeing by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and other governmental and non-governmental sources the Gulf South has found significant improvement elusive. Only Florida and Texas have made modest gains in their rankings while performance has declined for Alabama and Louisiana. Mississippi is the lowest performer in the country for the third time

Teresian Sisters in Covington, LA. in the past four years.

July 16

Dr. Mikulich met with Senator David Vitter's Chief Counsel to discuss criminal justice and sentencing reform in Louisiana and nationally.

Greater accountability and improved leadership is needed throughout the Gulf South region to improve the lives and opportunities of our children.

July 16

Dr. Mikulich served the Interfaith Payday Lending Roundtable convened by the US House of Representatives Financial Services Committee Ranking Member Maxine Waters in Washington, D.C.

We must ask this from our legislators and policymakers as much as ourselves. We are all responsible for the wellbeing of our children and we all have something to offer when it comes to improving their lives.



June 29

Dr. Weishar addressed immigration reform as a panelist at the Louisiana Commission on Human Rights Conference.

The [Bread or Stones](#) campaign from the Louisiana Interchurch conference, a multi-faith congregation driven movement, has involved congregations and communities alike to act on our moral obligation and common concern to improve our children's health, reduce their poverty, help them to stay in school and support their families. The Louisiana Interchurch Conference calls congregations to provide service, education, citizenship, and community engagement in order to address the needs of children in their communities. The Louisiana Interchurch Conference is not alone in their efforts to improve children's wellbeing in the Gulf South but greater efforts and support is needed at all levels.

June 23-28

Ms. Baudouin and Fr. Kammer led the Ministry of Management Program for Jesuits/colleagues.

Improving children's wellbeing is a tough task but ignoring the poor wellbeing of our children in the region is not an option when you consider the moral, social, and economic costs of ignorance. After all, "Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread..." (Matthew 7:9).

June 22

Dr. Weishar attended a meeting of Langeloth Foundation criminal justice grantees in New York City.

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